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ABSTRACT

The film "Pieces of a Puzzle" (part of the series "Writers Writing" that was coproduced by WNET and Learning Designs and televised by WNET in 1985), helped students become better writers and facilitated the discovery of material and techniques appropriate to academic writing. First, students were introduced to reader response theory, focusing on identifying, analogizing, and appraising. They then viewed the film, which is a true story about a black journalism professor and his white female student who write stories about evictions of blacks by their landlords. Students at Brooklyn College identified more with the evictees in the film than did students at New York University, but both groups developed a more objective view after seeing the film three times. The students then read and analyzed the stories written by the professor and the student, both of which favored the position of the evictees. Finally, a formal writing assignment asked students to employ techniques of arranging and manipulating the text similar to those used by the professor and the student in the film. To help with the assignment, the film and the news stories were analyzed for their arranging, editing, and highlighting of material. Through the film viewing and the writing assignment, students learned how they can use writing to help make the world better and how they can exert control over language and thus influence people. (SRT)

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PIECES OF A PUZZLE:

SEEING THE LIGHT IN A DARKENED ROOM

Frederick K. Lang
Brooklyn College
and
New York University

My report to WNET/Thirteen and Learning Designs on how I integrated the film Pieces of a Puzzle into the courses I taught during Fall 1984. This film is the third in Writers Writing, a series co-produced by WNET and Learning Designs, and televised during Spring 1985.

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67-YEAR-OLD GRANDMOTHER SLAIN WHILE BEING EVICTED

TENANTS ILLEGALLY EVICTED, PART OF "GENTRIFICATION" SCHEME

--recent headlines from

New York City newspapers

In my report on Telling an Old Story I described in some detail the three classes to which I presented the film, and in great detail the pre-viewing activities I had designed. Since I presented Pieces of a Puzzle to the same three groups of students, I will in what follows discuss the composition of each group only when I want to emphasize differences in response. I have mentioned my pre-viewing activities for Story because they also had to serve as such for Puzzle. It was a matter of time, not having very much of it between my first presentation and my second. For that I take full responsibility. As I indicated in my first report, all of my students are entering freshmen and most of them are very weak writers. As I also indicated, I wanted to wait as long as I could before using Story. Presenting it any earlier would, I felt, have been a case of too much too soon. My students would have been too inexperienced to accomplish what I asked, and perhaps too distrustful to try: I would not have been able to put the film and my activities to a real test. Delaying my presentation of the first film of course meant delaying my presentation of the second, and, since I had to give my students sufficient time for the activities that followed the viewing of Story, two weeks elapsed before I could show them Puzzle.

But we were definitely "into" film by the time we got to Puzzle. The formal assignment I had designed for Story, which required my students to think and write cinematically, served as immediate preparation for the second film. I wasn't quite satisfied, though: I wanted the class to take a different approach to Puzzle. So I did arrange one brief pre-viewing activity. It began with an introduction to some of the principles of reader-response theory. I summarized for my students what Simon Lesser says in Fiction and the Unconscious (1957) about the ways in which every reader responds to fiction. He posits three categories: identifying, analogizing and appraising. In identifying we recognize ourselves in several characters simultaneously: we see ourselves as villains and heroes, as victims and oppressors. Part of our satisfaction in identifying lies in recognizing our all-too-human condition--in knowing we are like others, in knowing we are not alone. Analogizing is a bit like daydreaming. According to Lesser, we all create parallels when we read. Satisfaction may lie in remembering or inventing a pleasant event or in reconstructing or altering a painful one. Appraising is a basic, continuous effort to comprehend events. We incessantly compare, infer, interpret, categorize; we test fiction against our own experiences. We judge fiction as "true to life" or "phony,"

characters as "good" or "bad," their behavior as "right" or "wrong"; and in doing so we assert our own values and defend the way in which we have shaped our lives. However, in responding to fiction we are also appraising ourselves--our beliefs, actions, relationships.

Rest assured that I further simplified this simplification of Lesser, whom I have yet to read. (I wish I could remember where I found that summary.) In addition, I told my students that what Lesser says about our responses to fiction holds for our responses to "nonfiction" as well. I then gave them examples of "response statements": from Ken Macrorie's books, from David Bleich's Subjective Criticism, but chiefly from the stockpile created by Prof. Lang's former students. Next I had the class talk and write (freely of course) about their responses to a few of the pieces collected in Robert Lyons's Autobiography, which I use at NYU and, with the aid of a xerox machine, at Brooklyn College also (see my report on Story). In other words, I had my students do some "identifying," "analogizing" and "appraising" of their own as a prelude to viewing Puzzle. For one of the things I wanted them to do after seeing the film was, in discussion and in freewriting, to express--and, in expressing, develop--their responses to it.

Obviously, though I was running out of time, I still had plenty of ambition left. I wanted to try a somewhat more sophisticated approach with Puzzle. That seemed to me only appropriate: it was at least a little later in the semester, and my classes had had the experience of both working with a film and creating "filmically." In addition, I wanted to refute the criticisms a number of my colleagues at Brooklyn had leveled at the films in the Writers Writing series. By the way, the colleagues of whom I speak have seen only Before the First Word; as for the other two films, all they have been willing to do so far is merely listen to my descriptions. (Yes: I did invite colleagues to sit in on my presentations. But there were scheduling conflicts, sudden indispositions, changes of heart. I am trying to arrange a "faculty only" presentation at a conference on developmental education that will be held at Brooklyn College in the spring.)

The criticisms? Well, the colleagues I have referred to feel that the situations rendered in the films are not good models for the freshman writer. "Models" is their word, not mine. They feel that both the social issues and the technical problems faced by the writers in the films are remote from the concerns of freshmen, and that, since the writing produced is "just journalism," it is unsuitable as a demonstration for students who must

do a more "academic" kind of writing--research papers, argument essays (like that required by the CUNY Writing Assessment Test). My shtick on reader-response criticism was intended not only to convince my students to trust their spontaneous responses to what they would see and hear, but also to show them a way to articulate, define and so deepen those responses. And besides stimulating somewhat, and schematizing somewhat, responses natural to any reader or viewer, I also expected to get something else out of this reader-response business: an example of how a teacher might both galvanize student responses and, at the same time, influence the manner in which they are expressed. Reader-response criticism is essentially just introspection encouraged by familiarity with basic psychological mechanisms, but since it is currently in vogue, it might, so I reasoned, break down the defenses some academics have erected against the unfamiliar. (If only teachers were as open-minded as students!) As for that criticism of the "journalistic model," the paper I assigned after presenting Puzzle was, as you will see, intended to counter the objection that there is some sort of unbridgeable gap between journalism and academic writing, between reporting and persuading.

This report, then, seems to have a "thesis" (though I have come to detest the word): it is simply that the

films in the Writers Writing series help students become better "academic" writers, that they facilitate the discovery of material and techniques which are not only appropriate to academic writing, but, indeed, typical of it.

My presentation of Puzzle was not very original, but neither was it uneventful, particularly at Brooklyn College. I showed the film to all three groups of students without stopping it even once, or disturbing either the video or the audio portions. This, too, I did with "other teachers" in mind. I wanted to be able to say that I had not been my usual innovative self, that if it worked "it" would be the film and nothing but. All I did by way of introduction was to mention the two writers involved: Cortland Milloy and one of his journalism students. Nobody in the class had the slightest hesitation about "responding" to the film, and that had nothing to do with either Frederick Lang or Simon Lesser. The event that Puzzle focuses on, the eviction of poor black people, is hot stuff. My students at Brooklyn College are almost all black, and almost all poor (they have to be bad off financially to qualify for SEEK). Since I knew those students quite well by this time, and since I could still remember my own "response" upon first seeing the film, I was certain that they would be angry. I had guessed correctly that "identifying" and "analogizing" with respect to the evicted tenants

would pose no problem, that a number of my students came from families who had been either evicted or threatened with eviction. Almost all of them live in ghetto tenements, and so have landlords who are "neglectful"--the mildest adjective that was used. My students at NYU did not react as strongly, simply because their experiences as tenants had been better, but they are almost all native New Yorkers, presently tenants, and have at one time or another had a run-in with a landlord over excessive rent or poor maintenance. (One NYU student was facing eviction proceedings. I did not learn of this until after I had presented the film, but I learned of it immediately after.)

Even while Puzzle was still running at Brooklyn College, my students began to voice their disapproval, and to express it in other ways as well. More than once I was tempted to stop the film and have a discussion, but I had told the class that I would run the film all the way through; besides, I did not want to interfere with the "relationship" they were having with it. I intended to show the film more than once: at Brooklyn that proved to be a necessity rather than a preference because the "spontaneous responding" became so loud at points that portions of the soundtrack were drowned out. In fact, angry comments from tenants being evicted were often "superseded" by angrier comments from students identifying, analogizing, and appraising.

A half hour later it was over--the film, that is. The discussion continued, the anger remained. (I was told by several colleagues who taught my students later in the day that the film was the only thing they wanted to discuss. I did not apologize. When I present the film to members of the Brooklyn College faculty, it should be a packed house: my students have proven themselves splendid publicity agents.) The major complaint against Puzzle was that the film showed, and showed again and again, black people as failures, black people as victims. That the film scrupulously avoided a black tenant/white landlord alignment was missed the first time around. I convinced my students to channel their feelings into their freewriting, and when the results were read aloud the word that occurred most often was "humiliation." A number of students felt that the presence of cameras added to the humiliation of the evictees, that they were suffering even more because their plight was being recorded on film and they knew it was soon going to be revealed, in painful detail, to the entire nation. There was a minority, though, who saw the film as a forum for the evictees, as a rare opportunity to publicize their side of the story. By my third screening of the film this minority had evolved into a majority: time and studying Puzzle more closely had brought about a shift from hot "identifying" to cool "appraising."

(I think that when I present a film in the Writers Writing series to my students at Brooklyn College they feel they are simply watching TV, and so imagine themselves part of a nationwide group--as they are when they are watching Dynasty, let's say, the most popular program among them. Part of the reason they are inclined to forget the TV set is a monitor is that each film runs half an hour, like many TV shows, and that each is so obviously the work of professional filmmakers. Also, the way each film begins, the "this program has been paid for in part" business, reminds them of other WNET programs: they are of the Sesame Street generation.)

When I later described for a friend who is a psychologist the response that Puzzle had received, he said that it was a classic case of "overidentification." My initial reaction to this diagnosis was that I had been partly to blame, that by involving them in reader-response activities before showing the film I had gotten my students to empathize with the black evictees to a greater degree than they would have had they been left to their own devices. In short, I felt initially that I had encouraged my black students to be angry with white people--the makers of the film, in particular--that I had caused them to forsake reason and good sense. But at the next class session I began to think better of my efforts. My students were

still angry at the film and at WNET: as I have said, they had continued to discuss the film on their own. However, they were now able to articulate, and even to be critical of, the motives for their anger. Many of them had had experiences like that at the center of the film: if it wasn't eviction, it was some other legal process that had been the victimizer, and that had been embodied by white people--welfare, police interrogations, the financial aid procedures at Brooklyn College. My class now felt that they had been angry at the film because it had forced them, simply by virtue of the fact that they were black SEEK students, both to relive and to imagine a series of painful experiences. They now saw "identifying" and "analogizing" as difficult processes which they had initially had to dramatize, but which they had now begun to work through, and beyond. In short, the class considered themselves ready and able to see Puzzle a second time, to discover what they had missed, or ignored, the first.

The class was cooler now--but still critical. One term that came up again and again after we had seen Puzzle was one I have never quite understood: "role model." The consensus was this: since there are so few blacks in films and on television, the few that there are should all be "positive" role models. When I asked for examples of black celebrities who provided this sort of role model,

I got a list of names which is too long to render here. Many of the names I am unfamiliar with, not only because I am of a different generation, but also because I simply don't watch the kinds of TV programs or attend the kinds of movies that my Brooklyn College students do. When they discussed television, they almost all mentioned Diahann Carroll of Dynasty, which, as I have said, is the most popular program among them. I have never watched Dynasty, but, through the essays of critic Michael Arlen, I know a little about its format. It is, like almost all the other programs my Brooklyn students enjoy, a "soap" which conjures up a world of wealth, power, sex and blissful indolence. When my students talk of a "positive role model," they seem to mean a fantasy figure radiating physical beauty and material riches. Apparently they just want to see some black people having and enjoying the success and wealth some white people do, so that they can feel they, too, have a shot at the "American dream." (Yes: there was talk of Elvis Yero and what Madeleine had revealed about his version of that dream.)

Cortland Milloy? At NYU he was considered a cool professional. the "star." But at Brooklyn College not many students felt they could identify with him, or were willing to take him as a "positive role model"--even though all of them felt that he had been intended to serve as

one. Some of the more outspoken students considered him a "Tom"; almost all, even those who found him initially appealing, argued that he changed when he went back to the office, that he started out close to his people, physically and emotionally, and then placed himself at a distance from them, again both physically and emotionally. In fact a number of students felt that Cortland Milloy became less sympathetic toward the evictees <u>because</u> he went back to the office, "isolated" himself to write the story. They pointed to the "dehumanizing" atmosphere of the office--the word processor, and so on--and to the effect it had on him--talking to people, not face to face now, but only on the telephone. Even during the initial viewing, though the noise level among my debaters was sometimes higher than that produced by the film's soundtrack, my students had apparently all heard him talk about his goals: objectivity, fairness, letting the reader decide. (Remember, at this point they still hadn't read the article.) Not only had they heard him talk about reporting, but they understood that the way he was writing the story was the way it had to be written, that he had to "go back to the office" after the leg work had been done. However, even though they all understood Cortland Milloy's job and his intentions, there were only a few among my Brooklyn College students who could see themselves in his shoes.

When I presented Story to my three groups, there really wasn't much difference between the response of my Brooklyn students and that of my NYU students. What differences there were reflected differences in age, maturity and sophistication: they were differences in degree, not in kind. With Puzzle, however, the response at NYU was much more subdued and much more sympathetic than that at Brooklyn. This may be partly attributable to the fact that out of a class of twenty students only three are black. But a sounder reason, I think, is that my adult students, even the younger ones, all hold full-time jobs. My NYU students are opposed to eviction on principle, and, as I have said, one of them was facing eviction when I presented the film. But they were able to identify with Cortland Milloy quite readily, for they almost all work in offices that look very much like his. In this case, the film's mise en scène, as it were, facilitated identification. Furthermore, my NYU students recognized the workaday world in Cortland Milloy's activities, and saw him as an individual trying to do the best job he could. The black students in the class felt he was more like them than the evictees were. Where my Brooklyn students tended to see themselves out on the street, my NYU students tended to recognize themselves in the office.

Even the initial response which Pieces of a Puzzle received at NYU was wide-ranging. One of my black students has been in the real estate business for thirty years, and has had to write out numerous eviction notices. She educated us all regarding the problems landlords face in collecting rent from tenants on welfare. Another black student in the class said he identified with the black landlord in the film, the man who said that the rent he received was his only source of income, and that that income was indeed modest. The student facing eviction talked and wrote at length about her situation, so that we got a new and detailed version of that "old story." At Brooklyn College the class was able to sustain this sort of "double vision" only after the second viewing, and then only tentatively. However, after the third viewing --my last because of lack of time--my students were ready to do, both verbally and in writing, some role-playing of the kind popularized by Gestalt therapy: two chairs; you are in one, the other is empty; you imagine your "opponent" sitting in the empty chair, say whatever you feel toward that opponent, and then switch chairs and reverse roles. And when it came time to freewrite position papers for the evictees and their landlords, an equal number of students volunteered to represent each group. By now my Brooklyn students were comfortable enough with the film, and with

themselves as viewers of it, to do some very levelheaded, and quite shrewd, "appraising."

Since the film's images dominated during the first viewing, and since we were shown relatively little of Cortland Milloy's student, my students at both Brooklyn College and NYU hardly noticed her. But she became clearly visible during the second viewing, and by the third, she was in sharp focus. The class found it easy to identify with Lisa simply because they, too, are writing students. (Cortland Milloy's struggle is perhaps too specialized, too much a matter of professional concerns, to elicit empathy.) Lisa's being white made little difference at Brooklyn College once who she was and what she was doing were clearly established. Her relative youth, I believe, facilitated "identifying" and "analogizing" with regard to her. The reason she did not become the object of resentful "appraising" was that she had no power, no influence over events: she was clearly in no position to do the things the class imagined that Cortland Milloy could do.

All my students laughed in recognition when they saw Lisa trying to arrange her notes by using index cards: they were recalling our activities before and after viewing Story. When I gave them their copies of the two stories, they were initially more impressed by her story than by

Cortland Milloy's. They were quite pleased by what they considered a case of student outdoing teacher. And print and film began to interact in a very intense fashion. Lisa's story called attention to "catch-out corner," and my students asked me to show the film a third time sooner than I had planned to because they were anxious to see, and hear, what they had missed regarding that "subculture" the first two times through. As vivid as those sequences are, they tend to get lost because the rest of the film provokes such strong reactions, and also because the "catch-out" situation is unexpected and so somewhat difficult to comprehend. If I hadn't made a promise to myself to let the film speak for itself this time, to refrain from "playing" with the buttons and knobs on the VCR, I might have shown the "catch-out" interviews as a separate sequence, so that they wouldn't be diminished by what comes before. Doing something like that might have encouraged a more detailed, dispassionate analysis.

There was more freewriting, and we continued to use that reader-response business as a framework. We all did more imaginative "analogizing": for example, we each chose an evictee and created for that person a "happy ending." (Lucy Tyler, of course, was the most popular choice--not despite the fact that she had died, but because of it. The "analogizing" mechanism seems

provoked by the biggest challenges to its powers of re-creation.) I have already discussed the "appraising" we undertook with regard to landlord-tenant relations. Though we did more along these lines, I would like to focus the remainder of this report on the formal writing assignment that grew out of my presentation of Puzzle, an assignment that asked my students to employ techniques similar to those Cortland Milloy and Lisa used. As I had in the assignment I devised under the influence of Story, I asked my students to write autobiographically, and for the same reasons: their inexperience, the fact that "first-person" material is relatively easy to generate, that they had a lot of it already--in, because of, their journals. I also had in mind the objection to the Writers Writing series I referred to earlier: that the "journalistic model" is simply inappropriate for students who are being asked to write "argument" essays. I wanted to demonstrate how weak that objection is--how just plain useful are the techniques students learn from films like Puzzle, from the writing they see, and hear, being done.

We began by analyzing, very crudely, Cortland Milloy's "objective" story. I had my students simply put an "l" beside whatever there was that supported the landlords' position, and a "t" beside whatever supported the evicted tenants' position. The latter group "won,"

hands down--both in terms of the number of supports and in terms of their length and impact. Cortland Milloy had weighted the evidence in favor of the evicted tenants, even when one considers that an evicted tenant will be more vocal than an evicting landlord. Milloy supports his thesis: it's just that he leaves it invisible. Lisa does something similar, though less subtle. As she says, the reader will know her position without her having to state it: it's there, plainly, in the choice of quotations, their arrangement, and so on. Both Milloy and Lisa make the "underdogs" in this situation look good: they each take a position and "argue it" persuasively, but without crude assertion. In fact, given the way the "supports" are handled there is no reason for crude assertion. Any more would be less, my students argued--an assertion would sound either lame or off-putting.

So my assignment was an exercise in deviousness, in "invisible assertions." A student's thesis was to be not stated but felt, not given but discovered: in effect, the reader's role was to become a collaborative one. We talked about the fact that this is easier to do with certain positions than others--easier to do with regard to tenants, let's say, than landlords, A lot of the success of this "sneaky" approach has to do with how well the writer knows, and can play upon, the reader's sympathies and biases.

My students had to make themselves look good: to describe their mode of behavior on a given occasion in such a way that it would seem more sympathetic than that of a "rival" individual or group. I also asked them to get from two supporters freewriting statements to use in their essays. What could be more "academic" than using supports, including quotations? How often have we all encountered an essay that began with a thesis statement properly made, and that then meandered off into territory quite remote from that so neatly mapped out by that thesis statement? In devising this assignment I had a kind of satori, an "aha" experience: thesis statements, propositions, or whatever they are called these days, work against effective organization because they provide a false sense of security, because the signal they give to students is that the job is done, when, in fact, it hasn't yet begun. Without a "statement," the "thesis" must always be kept in mind, and so it will always govern the arrangement of words on the page.

When we began to consider how best to arrange the material, I once again drew upon reader-response criticism. This time, though, I enlisted the aid of a literary critic--an "English teacher"--not a psychoanalyst. Stanley Fish has remarked that he bases his literature courses on a single question: What does it do--not say, but do?

The "it" is the piece of writing under consideration: a paragraph, a poem, a play, or whatever. The idea of course is to sensitize students to the kinds of strategies writers employ, to get them to see their responses as outcomes of, as directly traceable to, the maneuvers and manipulations undertaken by the text. (Like all reader-response critics, Fish encourages his students to base their analyses on both the "affective fallacy" and the "intentional fallacy.") I had my students consider both the articles and the film in reader-response terms: What does the opening of the film "do"? What do Lisa's opening and closing quotations "do"? That is, I wanted the class to be aware of the importance of arranging, editing, and highlighting, so that they could arrange, edit and highlight effectively when writing their own papers.

Here, once again, I was elaborating upon principles we had discussed during our activities for Story. However, now the emphasis was upon, not "flashback," but another key cinematic technique: "montage" (A adjacent to B produces C, though C goes unstated, unrecorded on the film). The class began to realize to how great an extent the "argument" of each article depended upon the choice and arrangement of material. During these activities, in preparing to write their own articles, my students became more and more interested in technique, less and less in content,

except as it acted to facilitate or hamper a persuasive telling of the story. The initial, and explosive, reaction had been to what the film showed us about the eviction process; this later "reading"--and here everyone was just as enthusiastic, though calmer--was concerned with what the film showed us about the art of persuasion.

We did some "dry run" freewriting for the formal assignment, and listening to my students read aloud, I felt that their anger at Puzzle had to a large degree been sublimated into writerly activities of the sort the film demonstrates so superbly. In short, my students were learning how to do much more with words than merely use them to express anger: they were learning how to get others to feel as angry as they did. Impotence was being replaced by a sense of power, identification with victims by a feeling of association with writers revealing their plight.

Though I had my students write autobiographically for the first assignment they did under the influence of Puzzle, they will before the semester is over be writing on a conflict in which they have no personal involvement, but in regard to which they have to take a stand. At Brooklyn College we have already written a number of CWAT-like passages based on the conflicts between landlords and tenants, and written CWAT-like, institutionally approved,

argument essays about them. (And, I might add, many of those students who were most angry when they first saw Puzzle have taken positions that favor landlords--this, despite recent cases, of the sort revealed in my epigraph, in which tenants being evicted were killed or hurt in the process.) Continuing to use the techniques they have learned from Story and Puzzle, my students will begin to move further away from both films, and then further away from their own experiences. They will become more sophisticated and eclectic regarding content, while remaining under the influence of the films--of Madeliene Blais, Cortland Milloy and his student Lisa--regarding technique.

Without any prompting from me, without all that reader-response business, there still would have been a strong response to Puzzle: there will be a strong response, no matter what the racial make-up of the group the film is being presented to. Black students, "ghetto kids," will be more vociferous than most groups, simply because their particular fears and animosities make them more sensitive, and so immediately responsive. (Remember, at Brooklyn College my students are still to some extent victims: they are isolated in a remedial program, unwanted by many in the administration, angered by the sense that they too could be "put out on the street" anytime.) The response I got at Brooklyn would, I think, frighten most

teachers. Because I have good rapport with my students, my only fear, and I experienced it just before showing the film, was that they would hold back, that they would be reluctant to express their anger to a white teacher whose sensibilities they have some regard for. It was by being so frank with me that they revealed how much they had come to see me as an ally, and how far they had come toward understanding what I have been trying to do for them, what the Writers Writing films have been trying to do for them. My Brooklyn students demonstrated how richly complex Puzzle is. By seeing it with them, I saw it at its best.

The reader-response techniques I have described did help. They provided us with a guide, a framework--particularly when it came to the freewriting done in conjunction with the film. I don't claim that such techniques are necessary if the film is to work, but I do think that an instructor has to provide students with a way of moving from the film's explosive content to its subtle form, from the "street" to the writer's "office." Even just insisting on written responses as well as verbal ones might be enough to facilitate this transition, this shift. Puzzle isn't difficult to use: it doesn't need a device of some sort to make it "fit" for a writing classroom. In fact, I feel that its very provocativeness renders

it superbly useful, marvelously efficacious in teaching writing. It taps a tremendous amount of energy and channels that energy into activity; as with so many arresting films, the feelings it evokes are so intense, the associations it triggers so strong, that in order to retain a sense of control we seek out the reasons for its hold upon us, try to define, and so in a sense master, the principles behind its construction.

Pieces of a Puzzle shows students what a bad world this is and that writing well is one way of beginning to make it better. It empowers students, demonstrates to them how they can exert more control over language, more influence over people. It makes students want to argue, then teaches them to argue persuasively.

The three films in the Writers Writing series--Before the First Word, Telling an Old Story, Pieces of a Puzzle--were produced by Learning Designs in cooperation with WNET/ Thirteen of New York. The complete series as well as individual films can be rented or purchased from the Encyclopaedia Britannica Educational Corporation / 425 North Michigan Avenue / Chicago, Illinois 60611. Each film comes with Teaching Notes; all are available in the following formats: 16 mm film, 3/4" U-Matic cassette, and 1/2" VHS cassette. Anyone interested in rental or purchase can call a toll-free number, 1-800 558-6968, for current prices. Anyone purchasing all three films qualifies for a 25 percent discount.